

UNHCR and Refugees

A "refugee" is defined by the United Nations as a person who has left the country of his normal residence because of fear of persecution. At the end of the Second World War, the number of refugees in Europe was close to 2.2 million. Immediately after the War, Canada and other countries formed the Inter-governmental Committee on Refugees in order to assist refugees in their emigration, re-establishment in their country of present asylum or voluntary return to their original homes. In 1946, a United Nations Specialized Agency, the International Refugee Organization (IRO), was established to continue this work. Canada became a member of the IRO in 1947 and, from 1946 to 1961, contributed about \$18.8 million to the organization.

At its fourth session in 1949, the General Assembly decided to appoint a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for a three-year term, to continue to protect the interests of refugees after the termination of the IRO. In 1953, the Assembly extended the term of the High Commissioner's Office for another three-year period, and in 1957 the term was extended for a further five-year period, from January 1, 1959, to December 31, 1963. The seventeenth session voted in favour of another renewal, to December 31, 1967.

The High Commissioner's role was at first a non-operational one, limited mainly to the protection of refugees. In 1952, however, he was authorized to appeal for funds to enable emergency aid to be given to the most needy groups of refugees within his mandate. Funds raised by this decision were contributed to the United Nations Refugees Emergency Fund (UNREF). In 1954 this fund was incorporated in a new voluntary fund, the United Nations Refugee Fund (UNRF), and its programme was aimed principally at the promotion of a permanent European refugee solution by assimilation within European countries and the promotion of emigration to other countries.

On January 1, 1959, the UNREF was replaced by a new programme of the High Commissioner for Refugees, administered by the Office of the High Commissioner under the guidance of an Executive Committee composed of representatives of United Nations member governments. Canada has been a member of this Committee since 1957. From 1951 to 1963, Canada contributed over \$2.8 million to the UNHCR and also donated \$350,000 in 1956-57 to the Canadian Red Cross for the assistance of Hungarian refugees. In its total pledged contributions from 1954 to 1962, Canada ranks as the fourth largest contributor.

Through the efforts of the refugee programmes of the Inter-governmental Committee for Refugees, the IRO and those of the UNHCR, the number of refugees in Europe has been reduced from about 2.2 million in 1946 to some 50,000 in 1962. This improvement has been made possible to a large extent by the contributions of governments to the United Nations and its related programmes, World Refugee Year (WRY) and the Inter-governmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM). During WRY (June, 1959, to June, 1960), 97 countries, including Canada, took part in the campaign and contributed more than \$83 million (U.S.). The Canadian Government's contribution to WRY was \$1 million in wheat flour to UNRWA and up to \$600,000 for the admission, in three movements, of 325 tubercular refugees to Canada for treatment in sanatoria and re-settlement. These refugees were accompanied by 501 dependents. As of March 31, 1962, only eight of these tubercular refugees remained in Canadian sanatoria. In addition to the movement of tubercular refugees, Canadian participation in WRY resulted in over 5,000 refugees being admitted to Canada, including 1,097 from camps in Italy and Germany.

UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was established by the General Assembly in December 1949 to provide for the relief and resettlement of about 950,000 refugees left homeless by the hostilities in Palestine in 1948. These refugees now number more than 1.1 million. The Agency was to co-operate with local governments in direct relief and works programmes in the Middle East and to consult these governments on measures to be taken until such time as international assistance for relief and works programmes